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Did it Really Happen?: Apologetics and Biblical Interpretation According to Carl F. H. Henry

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Did it Really Happen?: Apologetics and Biblical Interpretation According to Carl F. H. Henry

Description

The Bible makes remarkable claims about people and events in world history. Creation, Adam and Eve, Israel's escape from Egypt, the rise and fall of Israel's kingdom, the birth of the Messiah, Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection, the growth of the church—all points of interest by scholars for the historical veracity of the Scriptures. Yet, the Bible does not appear to present the acts of God in history for the purpose of vindicating historical accuracy of the text. The Bible is a story that reveals the living God through inspired writings that communicate the meaning of historical events. In light of the Bible as the revelation of God, and the high stakes of historical veracity for the claims of the Bible, how should Christians approach the interpretation of the Scriptures in a faithful way?

Carl F. H. Henry offers guidance as a foremost theologian regarding God, revelation, and the Scriptures. In *Did it Really Happen?* Jonathan Wood engages the thought of Carl Henry in dialogue with the major alternatives to revelation, history, and the biblical text. The value of Carl Henry's approach is shown to provide a path forward for affirming the historicity of the Bible while interpreting the text well.

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Did it Really Happen?

*Apologetics and Biblical Interpretation
According to Carl F. H. Henry*

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DID IT REALLY HAPPEN?

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AUGUST 27, 2019

For my wife

Ellen

and my children

Jackson, Olivia, Parker, and Lincoln.

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Introduction

The topic of revelation, history, and the biblical text is no mere exercise in the details of biblical interpretation. Rather, the issues undertaken in the pages ahead strike at the importance of the central claims of the Christian faith. The Christian faith rests on a written testimony of ultimate realities. The claim to Scripture as divine revelation is that the pages of the Bible display what is unavailable by direct sight to the modern eye—whether unrepeated historical event or transcendent spiritual realities. Both the *what* and the *why*, the *event* and the *meaning* are portrayed in the Scriptures.

Did God create? Why is there a physical creation, including humanity? Were Adam and Eve real people? How do those people stand in relationship to the ensuing generations of humanity? Did Israel flee Egypt in a haste under the wrath of Pharaoh? What did that deliverance mean for God's chosen people? Was a marvelous baby born under the nose of Herod? How was that baby to fulfill all that was promised across the previous millennia? Did Jesus really rise from the dead? What is the significance of the resurrection? We could go on with the ways in which Scripture claims God has acted in this world, and how the narrative of the Bible portrays the interpretation of those marvelous acts of God.

Lest we take such questions too lightly, let us be reminded these acts, and the meaning of them, seem to be of great importance to practical realities in life. Without the historical elements of the Bible—not the least of which are Adam and Eve as the first people created in God's image, Christ born of a virgin and identified as the second Adam, and the empty tomb of Christ—the textual depictions leave faith untethered from the world in which deliverance from sin is needed and accomplished. The point from the Apostle Paul with regard to the resurrection is sharp in 1 Corinthians 15.

Yet, Scripture does not appear to focus on the vindication of historical veracity, rather upon imparting the spiritual realities of God and His

ways through narrative description. Without the textual revelation of God in Scripture, which provides the meaning of the historical events, humanity would be left without the meaning and personal application of historical events as part of God's outworking of redemption. Where does this leave readers of the Bible today? How can one read the Bible well with respect to historical claims and the narrative shape of the writings? Certainly, followers of Christ want to get the interpretive process correct, knowing the pragmatic ways of Christian living inevitably follow Christian reading. These are the very practical hermeneutical questions in play with revelation, history, and the biblical text.

Carl Henry has provided an approach to revelation, history, and the biblical text that is worthy of attention, because he articulates God's involvement in history and humanity's ability to know this history, all the while focusing the interpreter's hermeneutical efforts on Scripture as the authoritative and truthful accounting of God's historical activity. In the chapters ahead, this book will explore the hermeneutical principles of revelation, history, and the biblical text through the writings of Carl F. H. Henry. Henry wrote in conversation with two contemporaries on the subject. Wolfhart Pannenberg stands at the headwaters of the "revelation as history" approach, and Hans Frei is notable as the genesis of narrative hermeneutics. As an evangelical focused on the doctrine of revelation, Henry articulates an approach different from the two aforementioned theologians. The purpose of this book is to argue that, in contrast to the "revelation as history" and to "post-liberal" approaches to revelation, Henry's doctrine of revelation generates a text-oriented, yet apologetically engaged, scheme of the relationship between revelation, history, and biblical text.

After setting a framework for how to evaluate questions of revelation, history, and biblical interpretation in chapter one, chapter two presents Carl F. H. Henry's assertions concerning the concepts of the revelation of God, text, and history in his systematic writings. Henry's doctrine of divine revelation affirms a broad sense of revelation in historical event as God's genuine activity, yet asserts the meaning and interpretation of the historical event is tied inseparably to divinely inspired writings. This approach to revelation produces a hermeneutic focused on the text, yet theologically and apologetically engaged in history.

Chapter three provides an analysis of a notion of revelation, strictly event-oriented, most clearly typified in the writings of Wolfhart Pannenberg. Pannenberg's revelation-as-history approach produces a thoroughly

historical approach to hermeneutics. Henry's evaluation of Pannenberg provides instructive critique for the tendency for evangelical emphasis on discerning revelation through history as the goal of interpretation.

Chapter four provides Henry's analysis of the approach of post-liberal method as exclusively text-oriented, specifically addressed through dialogue with Hans Frei. Post-liberal method has found welcome within evangelical method for the purpose of encouraging text-oriented hermeneutics.

After exploring the different hermeneutical priorities on the subject of history and the biblical text in Henry, Pannenberg, and Frei, chapter five undertakes the task of clarifying the value of Henry's voice for an evangelical approach to revelation, event, and biblical text. Analysis of the contemporary discussion will show, contrary to many contemporary descriptions of neo-evangelical hermeneutics, Henry has provided answers to many of the questions at stake. As a result of properly orienting the apologetic interest of biblical history and the revelation oriented nature of biblical interpretation, may it be that Christians read the Bible as God's faithful communication concerning himself and the true revelation of his magnificent accomplishment of saving sinners for his glory.

Revelation, History, and the Biblical Text

The Evangelical scholars who gathered at the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy for Summit II (ICBI Summit II) came together under the idea that the necessity of inerrancy had been established in the first summit.¹ The first summit produced what has become the foundational document for an evangelical description of inerrancy—*The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*. With the gains concerning the doctrine of revelation, the second council sought to complete the task of the first by carrying through the doctrine of revelation to its impact on hermeneutics as noted through the comment of James Packer, “[b]iblical authority is an empty notion unless we know how to determine what the Bible means.”² With this comment, the “hermeneutical problem” for evangelical theology was summarized and the trajectory was set for the ICBI Summit II. The notion that the Bible bears authority because it is communication from an authoritative God carries the implicit consequence that it is then authoritative for those to whom it communicates. Yet, as Packer acknowledges, the authority of Scripture as a function in an interpreter’s life is dependent upon the apprehension of God’s communication through the process of hermeneutics.

The relationship among revelation, history, and the biblical text is a significant factor for the proper apprehension of biblical meaning. This

1. ICBI Summit I, which was focused on the nature and defense of inerrancy, took place October 26–28, 1978. ICBI Summit II, which was focused on hermeneutics, took place November 10–13, 1982.

2. Radmacher, “Introduction,” xi.

triad is relevant in constructing hermeneutical approaches and thus bears impact on the breadth of theological method. Craig Bartholomew notes the existence of four broad turns in the history of modern hermeneutics. These turns are the historical, literary, postmodern, and theological turns.³ The narrative provided by Bartholomew's account of these hermeneutical phases leads one from the initiation of hermeneutics that are historically focused to the questions that evangelicals must now face concerning the relation of history to text.⁴ As has been documented by chroniclers of interpretive history, beginning in the eighteenth century, a shift took place toward a preoccupation with historical method.⁵ The resulting dominance of the historical-critical method in biblical and theological studies had a serious effect as noted by Edgar Krentz who writes:

It is difficult to overestimate the significance the nineteenth century has for biblical interpretation. It made historical criticism the approved method of interpretation. The result was a revolution of viewpoint in evaluating the Bible. The Scriptures were, so to speak, secularized. The biblical books became historical documents to be studied and questioned like any other ancient sources. The Bible was no longer the criterion for the writing of history; rather history had become the criterion for understanding the Bible. The variety in the Bible was highlighted; its unity had to be discovered and could no longer be presumed. The history it reported was no longer assumed to be everywhere correct. The Bible stood before criticism as defendant before judge. The criticism was largely positivist in orientation, imminentist in its explanations, and incapable of appreciating the category of revelation.⁶

The net effect was that historical justifiability must be present for taking the biblical text seriously. This development still holds influence, and its mark is evident on the most common hermeneutic of modern evangelicalism, the *historical-grammatical method*.⁷ While many historical-grammat-

3. Bartholomew, "Introduction," 3.

4. Ibid., 3. Important to note is that Bartholomew observes that the progression through various "turns" is not an oversimplification of interpretive history. He notes: (1) none of the turns are monolithic in their nature, (2) other significant epochs could be included on a more granular level, and (3) the initiation of one era did not do away with the presence of previous approaches.

5. The history of the move toward preoccupation with historical ostensive reference is chronicled in Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*.

6. Krentz, *Historical-Critical Method*, 30.

7. John Sailhamer draws the connection between historical referent-focused

ical interpreters may take exception to being identified with the positivist, imminentist trappings of the historical-critical method, evangelical interpretation has maintained a basic historical orientation.⁸ The historical shape of evangelical hermeneutics is typified in Gordon Fee's statement:

From the perspective of the biblical scholar, the first step toward valid interpretation of Scripture is a historical investigation known as *exegesis*, which means the determination of the originally intended meaning of a text. "History as context for interpretation" does not refer to our own history, but to the original setting(s) of the biblical texts themselves.⁹

In the early twentieth century, following the historical turn, literary criticism developed out of concern that historically focused reading neglected the literary shape of the text itself. Alter and Kermode note, "[historical] criticism was of great cultural and doctrinal importance; but, as we have said, it diverted attention from biblical narrative, poetry, and prophecy as literature, treating them instead as more or less distorted historical records."¹⁰ The literary turn is marked by an emphasis on the literary analysis of the Bible that does not always have an accompanying concern with historical issues.¹¹

Bartholomew points to a development out of literary emphasis into the so-called postmodern turn in the 1980s. The hallmark feature of the postmodern turn is that it served as a challenge to both the historical and

interpretive approaches produced by critical theory and its influence on contemporary evangelical historical-grammatical hermeneutics in chapter two of Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*.

8. Hays and Ansberry, *Evangelical Faith*; and Hoffmeier and Magary, *Do Historical Matters Matter?*. The discussion concerning the relation of historical criticism and the biblical text continues in evangelical scholarship to date with differing conclusions as to its place and practice in hermeneutics. For example, Hays and Ansberry have edited a work that engages many of the pertinent topics for historical concerns and biblical interpretation. In this work, the general approach is amicable toward the claims of historical criticism and its findings. Conversely, Hoffmeier and Magary have edited a work that engages similar topics with a critical appraisal of historical criticism.

9. Fee, "History as Context," 11.

10. Alter and Kermode, *Literary Guide*, 3.

11. A key work in the literary turn is Auerbach, *Mimesis*. Auerbach's work is particularly significant because of its use by theologians in reference to biblical hermeneutics. Most often referenced is Auerbach's argument in chapter seven that the biblical narrative presents a reality into which the reader is drawn. In particular, the influence of Auerbach's work on Hans Frei will be acknowledged in chapter four.

literary mindset, by asserting notions of pluralism and the indeterminacy of texts. Bartholomew's assertion is that "[postmodernity] questions the very foundations of [literary and historical approaches] and alerts us to the inevitability of a plurality of views in biblical interpretation."¹² Subsequent to the challenge presented by the postmodern turn, the door opened for what Bartholomew identifies as a theological turn. This turn is identified by two marks. First, Scripture is to be read according to its plain sense with a limited role for historical criticism. Second, hermeneutical emphasis is placed on reading under the influence of theology for the church and Christian doctrine.¹³

This cursory summary of approaches to text and history serves to indicate the longstanding tensions between historical interests and theological interests when interpreting Scripture. As Bartholomew argues, as a "theological turn" appears to be afoot, the importance of doctrinal presuppositions concerning Scripture is, in turn, influencing how one reads the Bible.¹⁴ These developments in biblical hermeneutics relate specifically to the issues of revelation, history, and biblical hermeneutics in contemporary evangelicalism. Within the concern of this book on Carl F. H. Henry as a significant theologian of the doctrine of revelation, my hope is that one will find beneficial resources in his writings on these issues.

As Henry's theology is articulated in the context of those with whom he was conversing, the particular approaches that merit analysis as significant influences on contemporary approaches to revelation, history, and the biblical text are that of Wolfhart Pannenberg and Hans Frei. The summary of biblical interpretation provided above finds a parallel in corresponding theological approaches to the doctrine of revelation with the historical turn

12. Bartholomew, *Behind the Text*, 10.

13. The concerns of historical interests and the biblical text are not limited to passages that may be identified as historical narratives. Other genres of literature in the Bible (i.e. poetry, prophecy, epistle, etc.) are impacted by how one approaches the issues outlined here. The point of relevance may be the historical occasion for a passage, or it could be that historical claims are expounded upon through a non-narrative literary form. For example, see Psalm 78 as an example of events historically oriented and their significance mediated through poetry.

14. Plummer, *40 Questions*. This has been manifested in the growth of the field identified as Theological Interpretation. Plummer notes "[i]ndeed, the recent publication of many titles related to [the Theological Interpretation of Scripture] demonstrates that the fascination with this hermeneutical approach is only beginning. In a sentence, TIS is an academic movement that seeks to return reflection on the biblical text to the purview of the confessing Christian church."

represented by the revelation-as-history approach of Wolfhart Pannenberg and the literary turn manifested in the post-liberal approach typified by Hans Frei. As a chief representative of the neo-evangelical movement, the writings of Carl F. H. Henry provide fertile ground for considering these issues from the perspective of the doctrine of revelation.

The Path Ahead

The purpose of this book is to argue that, in contrast to the revelation-as-history and post-liberal approaches to revelation, Henry's doctrine of revelation generates a text-oriented, yet apologetically engaged, scheme of the relationship between revelation, history, and biblical text.

The connection between one's doctrine of revelation and hermeneutical approach is not always transparent.¹⁵ In the pages that follow, I aim to make clear through Henry's example that one's approach to the doctrine of revelation in reality bears influence on the hermeneutical relation of text and history. For example, in the sentence, "God reveals himself to man," the doctrinal ideas contained in the word "revelation" have much influence over how one conceives of man appropriating that revelation. As will be demonstrated through Henry's theological writings, issues such as God's relationship to his revealed Word, the locus of revelation, the truth-value of revelation, and the nature of language and reference in revelation, among others, will bear direct influence on one's approach to history and textuality. Throughout Henry's writings on the subject, he interacts with key theologians who operate from differing revelational models. As such, these theologies provide contextual background to Henry's argument and must be considered. These writers, specifically Wolfhart Pannenberg and Hans Frei, will be considered in turn to evaluate Henry's critique of them.

As a chief representative of the revelation as history view, Wolfhart Pannenberg presents a thorough, historically focused model of revelation.

15. Note for example the relatively small amount of discussion in hermeneutics texts concerning the nature of divine revelation in terms of inspiration, authority, and reliability of the biblical text. The focus tends to rest on historical, philosophical, or literary dynamics rather than the relation of the text to God as communicator. A survey of contemporary hermeneutics texts bears this emphasis. For example, see: Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*; Kaiser and Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*; Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*; Brown, *Scripture as Communication*; and Plummer, *40 Questions*. In contrast, Poythress includes a substantive section on the doctrine of revelation in his hermeneutics survey. See Poythress, *God Centered Biblical Interpretation*.

For Pannenberg, God's revelation takes place within universal history. The implication of this model of revelation is that biblical history, in congruence with all history, is the content of revelation. The attached hermeneutical implication is then that man's appropriation of God's revelation is accomplished through man's appropriation of universal history. In terms of universal history, the biblical text is a record of such history and not possessing unique qualities itself.¹⁶ The significance of Pannenberg's revelation-as-history approach is that the biblical text as God's verbal revelation is undermined as the focus of authority and study. As noted above, the patterns of this view are found in varying degrees in evangelical hermeneutics. Given the influence of exegesis that is historically oriented among those who hold a high view of Scripture, engagement with Pannenberg from the perspective of his model of revelation is significant.¹⁷

Post-liberal theology marks a departure from approaches that are historically oriented and neo-evangelical notions of revelation in propositional terms. As a corrective against the undermining of the biblical text, Hans Frei argued for a restoration of the place of biblical narrative as self-sufficient for conveying meaning.¹⁸ As such, the biblical text does not refer per se to external events in terms of ostensive reference. Frei's notion is that revelation, whatever its particular model, has produced a literary text that is broadly characterized by history-like narrative. This text contains the necessary history-like material for conveying the content of the biblical faith.¹⁹ No need exists to move behind the text for the appropriation of meaning. As will be demonstrated, Henry's concern is that Scripture itself attests to the historical reality of the events about which it speaks, and theological claims rest on the truth of the textual claims to history. For Henry, abstaining from commitment on the truth value of biblical events amounts to excluding an element essential to the authority of the text as communication from God.

16. Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, 137. Pannenberg's undermining comments toward the idea that the Bible is a text that possesses "normative character," "authority," serves as "revelation of God," capable of significant "translation" into contemporary situations betrays his view concerning the nature of Scripture.

17. This is not to argue that Pannenberg himself is of primary influence on evangelical theologians who claim a high view of Scripture. Rather, it is an acknowledgement of the "eclipse" of biblical narrative (to use Frei's phrase) in favor of historical referent exegesis within evangelical ranks under the influence of the revelation as a history model.

18. Frei, *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 10.

19. Ibid.

With the bracketing of textual authority by the revelation-as-history approach and the bracketing of commitment to historical reality by the post-liberal approach, the question remains: what approach to the triad of revelation, history, and biblical text is appropriate? The approach advocated by Henry is that the biblical text is the locus of God's revelation. Yet, for Henry, revelation as a broader category includes all aspects of God's disclosure of himself.²⁰ In a broad sense, revelation then includes, for example, the person of Jesus Christ incarnate, his words spoken (whether recorded in Scripture or not), and the miraculous interventions of God in history, like the Exodus or the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. With this view of revelation, the historical reality of biblical events becomes important for the attestation of divine revelation in text. As will be demonstrated, Henry argues that, while text interprets and provides meaning to event, text may not exist in a vacuum separated from event. The apologetic value of historical reality is a secondary, yet necessary affirmation for Christian belief in Henry's eyes.

Carl F. H. Henry's Voice

The approach for this study is to access the issues of revelation, history, and the biblical text through the writings of Carl F. H. Henry.²¹ Henry holds privilege as an elite evangelical theologian, not only through his theological writings, but also through his position as the theologian-figurehead of the neo-evangelical movement in post-World War II America.²² Writing about Henry, the narrative theologian Gabriel Fackre has noted, "[i]f the twentieth century 'evangelical renaissance' in North America has produced a Michelangelo, that exemplar is surely Carl Henry."²³ Henry's place as the "Dean of Evangelical Theologians" was acquired through his unrelenting insistence on promoting a theological vision that would produce a personal Christian faith able to speak intelligently to every aspect of culture.²⁴ In his

20. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 2, 22.

21. For biographical resources concerning the life and thought of Carl F. H. Henry, see the following works: Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian*; Patterson, *Carl F. H. Henry*; Purdy, "Carl F. H. Henry"; and Mohler, "Carl F. H. Henry".

22. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*; Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism*; and Thornbury, *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism*.

23. Fackre, *Ecumenical Faith*, 171.

24. The title of "Dean of Evangelical Theologians" is a designator attributed to Henry

attempt to create a full orb ed movement marked by spiritual and academic potency, Henry published key works that interacted with the fields of biblical studies, theological studies, and apologetics.²⁵

In particular, Henry's well-known work, which is considered his magnum opus, *God, Revelation and Authority* (GRA), provides his account of the epistemological basis for Christian belief grounded in the revealed Word of God.²⁶ *God, Revelation and Authority* seeks to provide a biblically faithful explication of the doctrines of God and revelation, all the while taking seriously the impact of modernity on these subjects in contemporary theology. Henry's eminence is resultant of the fact that his six-volume work, as Trueman references, is the "most exhaustive evangelical statement on these issues to have been produced in the twentieth century and, upon its publication, marked the pinnacle of Henry's career as intellectual evangelical leader and spokesperson."²⁷ The need of the hour in Henry's estimation was to understand from every angle the world the Enlightenment had produced and respond to it on all levels in a competent manner.²⁸ Henry's concern for the doctrine of revelation and the doctrine of God extended beyond their consideration as heads of doctrine to developing their implications for the broader outworking of theology.²⁹

Similar to Packer's sentiment referenced at the beginning of this chapter at ICBI Summit II, Henry calls attention to the importance of hermeneutics when he states that for multiple generations, Western Christianity

in Olson, *A-Z of Evangelical Theology*, 41.

25. It is worth noting that in addition to the breadth of Henry's writings, his voice is of value also, because he has become known as the representative theologian of a significant constituency in modern theology. For example, see Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 37–41.

26. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 2:267.

27. Trueman, "Admiring the Sistine Chapel," 49.

28. Ibid., 51. Trueman notes further, ". . . Henry's *God, Revelation and Authority* stands as perhaps the major statement of evangelical epistemology which emerged from the new evangelical movement, designed to demonstrate the coherence of evangelical theology despite the criticisms of its enemies—and indeed, the misguided support of some of its friends."

29. Connor, *Revelation and God*. Carl Henry's works on the doctrines of God and revelation as the roots for religious epistemology certainly warrant the esteem they have earned due to the milieu from which he helped evangelicalism rise. It is worth noting that Henry's approach is not entirely original among American theologians. In 1936, Connor expanded upon his previous systematic writings to focus on the idea that to fix the ideas of God, revelation, and man in relation to each other is to fix the main ideas of theology. That is to say God, his revelation, and man's reception of it are the epistemic starting point for all of theology.

has grappled with the so-called “hermeneutical problem,” which is formulated in different ways, but is characterized by serious intellectual work to assess correctly the message of Scripture for contemporary readers.³⁰ Henry comments that “[n]owhere does the crisis of modern theology find a more critical centre than in the controversy over the reality and nature of divine disclosure.”³¹ This is because, according to Henry, who God is, how he has revealed himself, and how humanity avails himself of God’s revelation are three aspects of one central theological issue.

Henry’s hermeneutical concerns arose in the midst of his broader interest of establishing evangelicalism in contrast to liberal, neo-orthodox, and post-liberal theological methods. If one attempts to locate his hermeneutical concerns on the arc of Henry’s career, he will discover the primary writings concerning hermeneutics developed at the point of Henry’s in-depth engagement with the issue of divine revelation. A critical concern for Henry is the relationship of revelation, history, and the biblical text. This topic is taken up with the most depth in thesis seven in *God, Revelation and Authority*.³²

The historical quality of the biblical text is a recurring topic for Henry, because he views the truth value of Christian theology to be dependent upon the relationship of revelation, history, and the biblical text. Henry states, “[w]hile twentieth-century theologians frequently stress the redemptive faith of the Hebrew Old Testament, they minimize the historical factuality of the miraculous events that so prominently mark the ancient Jewish literature.”³³ The fullness of Henry’s approach to revelation, history, and text is brought to light through his assessment of two rival theologies of revelation in Pannenberg and Frei.

Recent Discussions of Revelation, History, and the Biblical Text

The historical claims of the biblical text are no new concern for interpreters and theologians. From the early formation of the church, the historical

30. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:296.

31. *Ibid.*, 2:7.

32. *Ibid.*, 2:247. Thesis seven states, “God reveals himself not only universally in the history of the cosmos and of the nations, but also redemptively within this external history in unique saving acts.”

33. *Ibid.*, 2:267.

claims of the biblical text have been accompanied by theological significance. For example, the foundational creeds of the Christian faith express grounding for the faith in certain historical facts. The Apostle's Creed describes Christ as the one who was "born of the virgin Mary; suffered under Pontus Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried . . . rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven; and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father almighty."³⁴ Similarly, historical presuppositions about the Son of God may be seen in the Chalcedonian and Athanasian creeds.³⁵ The longstanding historically oriented claims of the Christian creeds demonstrate the significance of the modern hermeneutical debate concerning historical event and the biblical text among theologians. Discussion concerning these historical claims has taken shape in modern theology along various lines that will be described below.

Post-liberal Influence on Evangelical Approaches

As a growing trend, a significant contingent of twenty-first century evangelicals began to make use of post-liberal theological method (at least in part), to the end that post-liberal emphasis on text has called evangelicals to question the usefulness of the historical-grammatical method.³⁶ The hermeneutical concern for evangelicals of this persuasion became the apparent frontloading of attention on the "historical" portion of the historical-grammatical method, which in turn led to an abdication of the text in hermeneutics and theology. In place of this, a literary approach became preferred as giving the text of Scripture its proper place as the center of spiritual life. The emphasis on the text over event has similarly been accompanied by critiques of propositionalism as a theological method because of its influence over hermeneutical approaches.

Critiques of Propositionalism

Just as propositionalism as a theological method has been critiqued for fostering a theology based on the ideas (propositions) behind the biblical text

34. For the text of the creeds mentioned and leading in-depth discussion, see Pelikan, *Credo*.

35. *Ibid.*

36. Ashford, "Wittgenstein's Theologians?," 357-75; and *idem*, "Wittgenstein's Impact on Anglo-American Theology."